

*The Mahābhārata and Greco-Roman sources: mapping out the destruction plan*

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In previous publications (*The Mahābhārata and Greek Mythology*, New Delhi, 2014, for example) I have argued that the *Mahābhārata* poets worked from a Greco-Roman “repertory” or “archive” in which the *Iliad*’s and the Greek Epic Cycle’s (the *Cypria* in particular) description of the Theban and the Trojan wars gave a kind of global model or overall framework for the main story. Although the idea of both wars as part of a plan for the destruction of a generation of heroes can be defended for the *Iliad* (and *Odyssey*) it is clearly evident in the Epic Cycle, in Hesiod, and even in other authors, such as Euripides. Under this broad umbrella other Greco-Roman materials, taken from very different sources, were used for the *Mbh.*’s composition.

Although in my previous research I have tried to basically expound the main specific examples, the common components, in order to highlight those uses, I have also began to answer some of the main issues at stake, for instance, the Subcontinent historical framework, the main ideological perspectives and aims of the author/s in the adaptation of those materials, differences between the main story and “secondary” stories in the global plan of the *Mbh.* and consequent effect on their use of certain Greco-Roman materials, and the historiographical context for the rejection of those connections since the turn of the XIX and XX Centuries on, when the “no-influences” idea became the dominant paradigm.

A lot of questions remain to be answered. However, it seems to me now compelling to tackle a more important task: to map out the uses of the various Greco-Roman authors and themes throughout the work, a question particularly significant in the case of the “heroes destruction plan” considering that I maintain its role as an overall framework for the main story.

My paper focuses on the main components of the destructive plan and their distribution in the *Mbh.* from Book 1 on, when the mystery of the Gods is presented, a secret clearly identified with the purpose for which the warriors to be killed were born (see, for example *Mbh.*1.58). The end is explicit in Book 16 when the second round of the process is finished with the destruction of the Vṛṣṇi and Andhaka along with Dvārakā, just as

Troy signifies the second and final round in the Greek destruction after the Theban war. The final part of the Book presents Vyasa telling Arjuna that after Kṛṣṇa's death and return to his previous state, he and his brothers may die, and identifying in his discourse the lightening of the burden of the Earth, the great work of the Gods, and the accomplishment of their lives' purpose. Interestingly enough, their lives are paralleled by their supernatural weapons returning to their owners (*Mbh.* 16.9.25-36).

In that context, some outstanding components are of particular interest, for instance, the fact that in the *Iliad*, Book 10 describes the night attack from the Achaean camp against the Trojan encampment by Diomedes and Odysseus, while in the *Mbh.* Book 10 describes the night attack by Aśvatthāma against the previous Kaurava's camp, now in the hands of the Pāṇḍavas, the virtual end of the war. Other essential components taken by the *Mbh.*'s authors from the plan of destruction devised by their Greek counterparts are displayed through the *Mbh.* in a recognizable way, letting us understand processes of use and adaptation: dramatis personae: a Goddess and her mortal husband, an invincible, yet unfulfilled son of that Goddess, a beautiful female created just to play her part in the destruction, an old blind king, a prince unrestrained by his father; settings: cities, palaces, battlefields, actions, and their sequences: offences given and taken, defeats, curses, flights, mortal wounds; objects: supernatural weapons, walls; or numbers: nine/ten and their multiples... The mapping out of these uses offers up a useful vantage point towards understanding the work's architecture. The quality and quantity of common components, most of them bizarre enough, and the very distribution of the adapted components, exclude the possibility of repetition by chance, mere cultural borrowing in oral contexts, or far off Indo-European common roots.